T2856

International Secretariat
Emiel Mocniusiei 174
2018 Antwerp
Belgium
(03) 235-3640

Ana Nunes
011-351-1-534009

UN Representative
777 UN Plaza # 4A
New York, N.Y. 10017
U.S.A.
Tel.: (212) 687-5340

pax christi

international catholic peace movement

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: S. Mary Beth Reissen
212/687-5340

New York, NY
February 7, 1991

KUWAIT-EAST TIMOR PARALLEL DRAWN AT MEETING
OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

The parallel between Kuwait and East Timor was emphasized by many participants in a meeting to mark the second anniversary of the letter of Bishop Carlos Belo of Dili, East Timor, to the UN Secretary-General regarding the decolonization of (Portuguese) East Timor. This meeting, under the joint sponsorship of Pax Christi International and the Japanese Catholic Council for Justice and Peace, was held on February 6, 1991, at the Church Center for the UN, New York City.

Bishop Belo, as a spokesperson for the people of East Timor, stated in his February 6, 1989 letter: "We are dying as a people and a nation." He asked the UN Secretary-General to support the desire of the East Timorese people for a referendum under UN auspices.

The Indonesian army invaded East Timor in 1975 and declared the region Indonesia's 27th province just as Iraq declared Kuwait its 19th province. Almost immediately after the Indonesian invasion, 60,000 people, 10% of the population at that time, were killed. In the ensuing period, at least 200,000 people have lost their lives under Indonesian occupation.

In his remarks at this commemorative meeting, the Right Reverend Paul Moore, Jr., Episcopal Bishop of New York, Retired, who visited Bishop Belo as part of a human rights mission to East Timor in December, 1989, stated: "The East Timorese people have suffered intensely over the years. Their hope has been kept alive that the United Nations would ensure their choice for the future." Bishop Moore deplored both the lack of action by the UN and the lack of public knowledge about the plight of the East Timorese people under Indonesian occupation.

The representatives of non-governmental organizations present pointed to the parallel between Kuwait and East Timor. Ambassador Fernando Jose Reino of Portugal mentioned that the Kuwait-East Timor parallel had also been discussed at the current session of the UN Human Rights Commission.

Mr. Kan Akatani read a letter from the Bishop of Nagoya, Japan, Aloisius N. Soma. Speaking on behalf of the Japanese Catholic Council for Justice and Peace, Bishop Soma supported the letter of Bishop Belo and pointed out that the people of East Timor had organized three protest demonstrations resulting in

imprisonments in the last two years. "The people's aspiration for self-determination is undeniably real," asserted Bishop Soma. Emphasizing that "the invasion of East Timor was in clear violation of international law and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights," Bishop Soma observed that "the influx of Indonesians in East Timor was "more and more eroding the East Timorese people's right to self-determination.

Bishop Soma pointed to wide support among the Catholic Bishops of Asia-Oceania when he initiated a campaign on behalf of Bishop Belo in 1989. He stated that a similar campaign was underway in Europe.

In his message to the meeting, Bishop Thomas Gumbleton, President of Pax Christi-USA, observed that the implementation of Bishop Belo's appeal would be an authentic testimony in this UN decade of decolonization (1990-2000). He pledged every effort on the part of Pax Christi-USA to work to raise the moral conscience of United States policy-makers towards East Timor.

Those attending the meeting endorsed a resolution of Pax Christi International urging the UN Human Rights Commission to update its findings on the status of human rights of the people of East Timor and to take all necessary steps to ascertain their aspirations regarding their future status.

Pax Christi International continues to urge the UN Special Committee on Decolonization to send a mission to East Timor to meet with Bishop Belo and other leaders in order to recommend the most suitable steps for the East Timorese people to realize their self-determination. To date, in the case of East Timor, the UN has not applied its own resolutions regarding decolonization.